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Original Center for the  
Study of Democratic  
Institutions

## Off Center?

"The Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions," its president, Robert M. Hutchins, is fond of saying, "is not a very good center, but it's the only one there is." When he started the center ten years ago, Hutchins, dean of the Yale Law School when he was 29 and president of the University of Chicago when he was 30, envisioned an independent community of scholars to consider the great issues of the times. Hutchins and his band of fellows always thought big—one project currently is a model new constitution for the U.S.—but lately Hutchins, now 70, feared the dialogue was growing stagnant. He wanted to make the center "more of the world." He thought the center needed "new blood"—and unless drastic change occurred, he was ready to give up the whole idea of an independent, critical center of thought and take another post.

In a bloodless—but decidedly undemocratic—palace coup, six of the center's sixteen active fellows were asked to resign and four others were reassigned to relatively unimportant administrative posts, leaving only seven fellows in the "reconstituted" center.

The reconstitution began this spring, when Hutchins appointed four men to select a new fellowship: Harry Ashmore, the former journalist who is now executive vice president of the center; John R. Seeley, dean of the center's academic program and former chairman of the Brandeis sociology department; John Cogley, former religion editor of The New York Times and editor of the Center Magazine (he helped build center membership from 7,000 to 100,000), and Harvey Wheeler, co-author of "Fail-Safe" and former political-science professor at Harvard.

Cogley suggested that the best procedure would be for Hutchins to name himself permanent senior fellow and then to select one more; the two would select a third, and so on. Adopting that plan, Hutchins selected Wheeler; the two of them selected Rexford Guy Tugwell, the former FDR braintruster and governor of Puerto Rico; they in turn picked Cogley and Ashmore. The list grew to seven and then the "ins" deadlocked—and everyone else was "out."

**Ousted:** Those left off the list were shocked. The ousted included Seeley himself; former Episcopal Bishop James A. Pike; Wilbur H. (Ping) Ferry, center vice president, an original member and author of many of the center's controversial papers, including a recent dialogue on black studies, and Hallock Hoffman, also an original center member and its coordinator of studies. Ferry, who had been with Hutchins for fifteen years, was touring in Scotland when he received Hutchins's matter-of-fact letter telling him of the ouster. "I thought I'd live out my working days here," he said.

"All rules were abandoned," another protested. "What was designed as the purest of democratic procedures became something as dirty as the dirtiest political convention. What happened here was the height of depravity." Another ex-fellow held that the "radicals" were axed. "It was a case of the activists versus the pure intellectuals who were turned inward," he said. "All the gentle and humane people are out."

Hutchins himself tacitly acknowledged the nature of the conflict. "The kind of interdisciplinary effort I contemplate," he said, "can only be accomplished by dialogue. The center seldom deals successfully with men whose major interest is in something else." He now thinks he has strengthened his community of scholars interested in "a common effort to understand the contemporary world." In keeping with Hutchins's new directions, the center will bring more international scholars into the fellowship to form a "world academy—a true university in which all members help educate each other." More immediately, next month the center will sponsor a meeting of Latin American scholars in Mexico City; then it plans a global seminar on the seas, to be held in Malta next year.